

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 1361

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (COMANECI, NADIA), RO
SUBJECT: NADIA COMANECI AND GYMNASTICS TEAM TOUR OF U.S.

REF: STATE 044271

1. EMBASSY OFFICER MET TODAY WITH INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DIRECTOR OF ROMANIAN NATIONAL SPORTS FEDERATION, ION PAUN AND HEAD OF GYMNASTICS FEDERATION VIERU CONCERNING NADIA COMANECI'S ILLNESS AND POSSIBLE CANCELLATION OF TOUR. EMBASSY OFFICER STRESSED THAT HE WAS MERELY PASSING ON INFORMATION FROM U.S. GYMNASTICS FEDERATION INQUIRING ABOUT WHETHER NADIA COULD MAKE AN APPEARANCE AT AMERICA CUP MATCH EVEN IF SHE WAS UNABLE TO PERFORM AND INFORMED PAUN AND VIERU IN POLITE TERMS THAT FEDERATION IS CONSIDERING CANCELLATION OF VISIT IF SHE CANNOT ACCOMPANY TEAM. PAUN REPLIED THAT THERE HAS BEEN EXCELLENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO GYMNASTICS FEDERATIONS SINCE 1973, WHICH THEY FELT WAS MUTUALLY VALUABLE AND THAT THEY HAD ARRANGED WITH THE U.S. GYMNASTICS FEDERATION TO MAKE TWO U.S. VISITS IN 1977 IN RETURN FOR \$400,000. THE FIRST VISIT WOULD BE BETWEEN MARCH 9-26 AND WOULD BE COMPETITIVE WHILE THE SECOND WOULD BE IN OCTOBER OR NOVEMBER AND WOULD INVOLVE ONLY DEMONSTRATIONS. THEY HAVE ASSEMBLED THEIR BEST TEAM AND WOULD HAVE INCLUDED NADIA BUT THAT REGRETTABLY SHE IS UNAVAILABLE. THEY COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND THE CONCERN OF THE U.S. GYMNASTIC FEDERATION BUT HER HEALTH IS MORE IMPORTANT AND SHE WOULD NOT EVEN BE ABLE TO

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TRAVEL AS A NON-COMPETITOR. THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEND THE TEAM (HEADED BY TEODORA UNGUREANU, (NO. 2 ON THE TEAM) AND DAN GRECU (REPUTEDLY THEIR TOP MALE PERFORMER). MEANWHILE THE PROPOSED FALL TRIP WOULD INCLUDE NADIA IF AT ALL POSSIBLE.

2. PAUN MENTIONED THAT THEY HAD JUST RESPONDED TO THE ROMANIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON GIVING THEM THE SAME ANSWER.

3. AMBASSADOR HAD CALLED DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER GLIGA (WHO HAS THE SPORTS PORTFOLIO AT MFA) EARLIER IN THE DAY TO ALERT HIM TO PROBLEM. GLIGA CALLED AMBASSADOR IN LATE IN AFTERNOON AND WHILE PROVIDING MORE DETAILS RECONFIRMED NADIA'S UNAVAILABILITY. GLIGA EXPLAINED THAT NADIA'S TRAINERS HAD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT GIVEN THE PHYSICAL CHANGES SHE WAS GOING THROUGH AT THIS AGE, THE EFFECTS OF THE OLYMPICS AND SUBSEQUENT TOURS, SHE WAS SIMPLY NOT IN CONDITION TO COMPETE PUBLICLY FOR SOME TIME. SHE HAS BEEN PUT ON A RIGOROUS TRAINING PROGRAM WHICH WILL PROBABLY LAST THROUGH APRIL. AS A RESULT SHE HAS HAD TO MISS PARTICIPATING IN GYMNASTIC EVENTS IN BOTH ITALY AND GREECE TO WHICH SHE HAD EARLIER BEEN COMMITTED. SPORTS COUNCIL'S HOPE IS THAT NADIA WILL BE IN GOOD ENOUGH SHAPE TO PARTICIPATE IN ROMANIA'S OWN GYMNASTIC COMPETITION LATER THIS SPRING. GLIGA, QUOTING HEAD OF ROMANIANS SPORTS COUNCIL, SAID THAT COUNCIL HAD KEPT HOPING THAT SOMEHOW THE TRAINING PROGRAM WOULD PUT HER IN GOOD ENOUGH SHAPE TO GO TO THE STATES BUT THEY HAD HAD RELUCTANTLY REACHED THE DECISION THAT SHE WAS NOT YET ABLE TO COMPETE.

4. SPORTS COUNCIL IS PREPARED TO SEND THEIR OTHER TOP GYMNASTS INCLUDING TEODORA URGUREANU. THEY ALSO PROPOSE THAT TOUR FOLLOWING AMERICAN CUP BE CONFIDENTIAL

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CANCELLED AND BE RESCHEDULED FOR NOVEMBER AT WHICH TIME NADIA HOPEFULLY WOULD PARTICIPATE. GLIGA MENTIONED SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE CONVERSATION THAT THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO OTHER MOTIVATION WHATSOEVER FOR NADIA'S NON-PARTICIPATION THAN THE TRAINING CONSIDERATIONS WHICH HE HAD DETAILED. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED REGRET THAT ROMANIAN SPORTS COUNCIL HAD NOT COMMUNICATED ITS PROBLEMS SUFFICIENTLY CLEARLY AND EARLY ENOUGH TO US GYMNASTICS FEDERATION TO PREVENT THIS LAST MINUTE DISAPPOINTMENT. GLIGA NOTED ONLY THAT, ACCORDING TO SPORTS COUNCIL, US FEDERATION HAD BEEN TOLD IN MID-JANUARY THAT LIST OF ROMANIAN PARTICIPANTS STILL WOULD NOT BE SET UNTIL MID-FEBRUARY. IN ANY CASE HE ARGUED THAT ROMANIA HAD EVERY INTEREST IN NADIA'S PARTICIPATING AND THAT THE DECISION HAD BEEN AN EXTREMELY HARD ONE TO MAKE.

5. ON THE QUESTION OF NADIA'S APPEARING AT AMERICA CUP WITHOUT COMPETING, GLIGA SAID HE HAD RAISED THIS IDEA WITH HEAD OF THE SPORTS COUNCIL WHO TOOK A NEGATIVE VIEW ON THE GROUNDS THAT THIS WOULD REQUIRE ALMOST A WEEK'S BREAK IN HER TRAINING PROGRAM. GLIGA SAID HOWEVER THAT IF WE WANTED TO PRESS THE MATTER HE WOULD GO BACK TO SPORTS COUNCIL PRESIDENT WHO WOULD IN TURN HAVE TO GET COUNCIL OF MINISTERS APPROVAL TO LET NADIA OFF HER TRAINING SCHEDULE. GLIGA'S GUARDED PERSONAL OPINION WAS THAT PRIMARY ROMANIAN CONCERN WOULD BE WHETHER ABSENCE INVOLVED IN EVEN NON-COMPETITIVE APPEARANCE BY NADIA WOULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE CHANCES OF HER GETTING BACK INTO SHAPE ON TIME.

6. COMMENT: GLIGA'S EXPLANATION WAS VERY STRAIGHT-FORWARD. FYI. WE ALSO HEARD REPORTS THAT SHE IS NOT ILL BUT RATHER IS BEING KEPT OUT OF THE PUBLIC LIMELIGHT LEST THE GREAT CONFIDENTIAL

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ADULATION SHE HAS RECEIVED THRU HER HEAD. END FYI. WE ASSUME IT WAS NOT GIVEN EARLIER PERHAPS OUT OF EMBARRASSMENT AT ADMITTING THAT NADIA WAS NOT IN GOOD SHAPE OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THE OFTEN CHARACTERISTIC ROMANIAN RELUCTANCE TO TALK ABOUT PROBLEMS. IN ANY CASE, IT SEEMS THAT FOR VARIOUS REASONS BOTH SIDES ARE AGREED THAT THE POST-AMERICA CUP TOUR BE CALLED OFF. AMBASSADOR LEFT IT WITH GLIGA THAT HE WOULD BE BACK IN TOUCH IF US GYMNASTICS FEDERATION WOULD STILL LIKE PURSUED THE QUESTION OF NADIA'S APPEARANCE AT AMERICAN CUP IN NON-COMPETITIVE ROLE. PLEASE ADVISE. BARNES

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